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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe and reflect on an attempt to create a regional educational plan that uses parts of the existing governmental structure. The idea is to create a shortcut in linking educational producers with consumers. The design stage is analyzed to establish the credibility of the program's organizational structure. The program is intended to use informal and formal education to bring literacy to the largely poor and illiterate rural population of the highlands of Guatemala. (Author/IRT)

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DESIGN OF A REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN. AN ILLUSTRATION: INFORMAL EDUCATION IN THE HIGHLANDS OF GUATEMALA

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DESIGN OF A REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN.

AN ILLUSTRATION: INFORMAL EDUCATION IN THE HIGHLANDS OF GUATEMALA.

1. The threadbare-worn complaint concerning the inadaptation of education to the needs and aspirations of its contemporary "clientele" seems to find a measure of respite whenever attempts are made to mesh school, or out-of-school, institutions in the societal fabric of the community resorting to its services. The nature of these "educational services" must then come close to the motivations of its users.

2. One way to achieve this short-cut between "producers" and "consumers" of education is to break away from abstract urban models controlled by a centralized administration and attempt to develop educational services at a regional or local level. Decentralized education exists not only in Federal countries (U.S., Brasil, Canada, Australia) or in Confederation (Switzerland) but also in purportedly centralized systems (Colombia, United Kingdom).

3. The purpose of this paper however is not to look at the formal constitution-based administrative institutions, which may facilitate the "bottom-up" planning approach, but rather describe and reflect on an attempt to find this "short cut" through a regional educational project. The "design" stage will be analyzed with a view to get a first impression of its credibility in terms of the organizational

structures proposed to make it work. It is an on-going activity in which the author is directly involved.

i. Some indications of a preliminary nature:

4. Two thirds of the country's population of 5,75 millions (1) live in rural areas. Close to half of this rural population is concentrated in the North-West Highlands. This Area which covers some 28.000 kms^2 (almost a third of the nation's) includes a total population of 1.9 million people, less than 20% of whom live in communities of 2000 inhabitants or more. The remaining 1.5 million live in rural dwellings on mountains, at altitudes ranging between 1500 and 2200 meters. The population density is considerably higher than the national average, exceeding 130 inhabitants/km^2 in two of the seven departments making up this area. Of these 1.5 millions, over 1.1 millions are indians.

5. In 1968 the literacy rate for the area hovered between 10% and 30%, the average being 21% while the school participation rate for the 7-14 age group ranged between 17% and 45%, the average being 25%. A quick look at primary school drop-out rates in the Area (45% from Ist. to 2nd. grade, 35% from 2nd. to 3rd., 52% from 3rd. to 4th, etc.) show their intimate relationship with the literacy figures...

6. National figures for 1964 point up differences linked to ethnic origin. While non-indian urban males had a literacy rate of 79.6%,

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(1) Per capita GDP at current price: $ 400.00

the corresponding figures for indian rural males was 16.3%. For females the difference is more striking still, non-indian females: 70.2%; indian rural females: 4.5%.

7. This impressive "educational gap" due to a host of factors, the most obvious of which is the use of indian main languages (five) and dialects (fourteen) rather than spanish. In addition, some social resistances by indians, reticence by non-indian urban dwellers to give up the privilege of being attented to first and the broken topography which discourages school constructions and teachers appointments- all help explain the cultural marginality of this population.

8. From an economic point of view, suffice it to say that an in-depth study conducted in 1967 (1) revealed that for the 7 departments the net income averaged US $ 27.41 per annum and ranged from: $ 7.11 to $ 51.90 per capita, yielding US $ 169.90 per family (range: from $ 45.48 to $ 269.28). This is explained by the fact that the average plot size per family is 1.11 ha and that while such plots covered 28.3% of the area they represented 84.8 of the number of properties. Conversely 1.20% of the properties (multi-family plots of 25 ha or more) covered 43.5% of the Area. This "minifundismo" barelly allows a family

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(1) L. Schmid "The role of migratory Labor in the Economic Development of Guatemala" University of Wisconsin 1967.

to survive with the monetary income derived from seasonal wage earning activities during the coffee and cotton harvests. Yet more than 80% of the population live off their land, reflecting hte highest proportion of employment in agriculture in all of Latin America, with the exception of Haiti. Intensive food crop agriculture obviously predominates, maize and beans being staple crops. Productivity is very low and stagnating, as techinical assistance (extension) and agricultural credit services are far from being easily available in the Area (1).

9. Weekly food intake for a family includes 25 lbs. of maize, 3 lbs. of beans, 1 lb. of rice and 1 lb. of meat, and offers less than 2000 calories and less than 15 gr. of animal protein per day and per person. Close to 90% of rural dwellings are without drinkable water and drainage facilities are practically non-existent. Contaminable gastro-intestinal and respiratory deseases are endemic, accounting for 28% average infant mortality in this Area, reaching 33% in one Department. Life expectancy at birth is 23 years and at 14 years of age goes up to 33 years.

ii. Design of an out-of-school Plan in the Highlands: its organizational structure.

10. Given this rather bleak panorama, it is no wonder then that over the years successive governments launched programmes in health, agriculture, education, housing, transport and handicraft production in various attempts to improve the lot of the Highland

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(1) Gobierno de la República de Guatemala, Secretaría del Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica "Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural Integral del Altiplano Centro-occidental "Guatemala, Febrero de 1968. See pp 5-21 from which most data in this paragraph is taken.

population. In the field of out-of-school education alone there are some 16 activities run by the public sector and probably twice as many by the private sector. It is however difficult to detect a measurable impact either of the sectoral programmes or of the educational activities. As 1971 census figures are being processed little seems to indicate substantive -or even significant- modifications of any of the parameters sketchily indicated above.

11. The new government which took over in June 1974 has gone on record -both before and after elections- that their prime responsability to the Highland illiterates would receive highest priority in the actions to be framed by the 1975-1979 Development Plan. Thus, the road was open for another attempt at grappling with the issue of the "marginality" of the Highland indians. As the hypothesis of the new Plan is to decrease dependency of external markets, the first step is to push for a spectacular increase in agricultural productivity in subsistance agriculture areas, first and throughout the country, next. This in order to achieve foodstuff import substitution and greater diversification.

12. At the same time, both the Planning Council Secretariat and the Ministry of Education have jointly defined anew the role of education in Guatemala. It is to be viewed as a global "system" available to the entire population - not withstanding their age of their previous school attainment - and made up of three "sub-systems" school, out-of-school, science and technology.

The policy and operations of the "out-of-school sub-system" will be governed by a National Board on which will sit representatives of all Ministries and institutions active in this sub-system.

13. The combination thus of the Government's two-thronged policy to eradicate substantially illiteracy, as a symptom of the cultural marginality, as well as achieve new agricultural objectives and the creation of the National Out-of-School Board seems to hold out a rather attractive possibility for leading off with a new and realictic enterprise. Thus will be "integrated" the two objectives (literacy and agricultural productivity), the instrument for action being the Board.

14. It was agreed from the start that this new action-programme would not be allowed to become another "experiment" or "pilot study". Rather, it was felt that unless it attempts to affect at least half of the indian rural population in the Highland in the course of the next five years it would neither be meaningful nor usefully "evaluated" for onward expansion, re-direction or re-tooling. Thus after initial costing exercices yielding unit cost estimates for a non-formal programme for 10-14 years old children and male and female adults from 15-45 years, it was decided that the Government could launch, and find financement of a programme which would involve 600.000 people over 5 years. Formally speaking, there exists therefore, a 5 year Plan for informal Education affecting half of the rural population of the most critical region of Guatemala.

15. The programme itself is to be made up of two 9 months sessions geared to the agricultural calendar. The contents are to be identified with the local environmental and production problems of each department-and within them according to the nature of the main production zone- of the Area. Three types of programmes will be devised according to each of the target - populations (children 10-14, male adults 15-45 and female adults 15-45). Means of "delivery" are to include bilingual "monitores" (whose mother tongue must be that of the community where they will operate) as well as radio. The "curriculum production will use as a methodological model the achievements of the Unesco-assisted functional education experiment of Sololá (one of the seven departments) and radio delivery and programming will use the results of the US AID-supported "Basic Village Education Programme" in Quesada (Eastern Guatemala). The entire project is to be "integrated" in multi-agencies operations. For example the "content" of an agricultural activity (say, basic grain production) will be entirely devised by the agricultural extension agent; the health activity (water purification) will be conceived by the health agent; etc..

16. This programme will be modular so that after the achievement of a first educational "water-line" (module No.1), others will be added to it at the same time as each of these new "modules" will correspond to a specific level of the formal school-system. Thus, the programme roughly outlined above will be that of

"Module 1" corresponding to the first four years of primary school. Further "Modules" are being designed to fit formal school units such as 2 more years of primary, 3 years of lower level secondary school, etc... Their content and the educational methodology will be however quite distinct from conventional classroom curricula but they will be equivalent in terms of Terminal Performance Specifications avoiding the pitfall of national examinations or certification tests wich - naturally - would "re-school" the modules... The Board will set criteria to be then applied by the Ministry of Education, or by the "Module" programme, in order to obtain reciprocal recognition of past achievements.

17. The translation of the "Module" programme in organizational terms takes us to the heart of the issue: how can one "regionalize" or "localize" education? The first obvious step in Guatemala is to legalize out-of-school education without institutionalizing or freezing positions. Thus, the Minister of Education who, according to the Law, is the Supreme authority responsible for the country's educational policy accepted the establishment of a National Out-of-School Board which he will chair but which will have as members the Vice-Ministers of Agriculture and Health, the Secretary-General of the Planning Commission as well as the Managing Directors or Presidents of all public institutions having a training or education function. Given the multi-agency programme of the "module", the Board will be responsible for taking those measures which

permit joint action and continuous evaluation.

18. Yet this structure would not be enough. The real problems are to be found at the grassroot since by definition curriculum production is to be integrated in production-oriented areas of interest or motivations. Hence, regional and -further down still- local organizations are called for. The link between the Board and the regional coordination structure will be ensured by the Executive Secretary of the Board.

19. Looking specifically at the Regional level there are to be several units: the office of Coordination, the Programming Team, the Personnel training and the Administrative Unit. While the Coordinator is to be appointed by the Board, the Programming team is to be appointed by the Coordinator and will be made up of specialists seconded by their Ministries or Institutions-all represented on the Board. The Team leader is to be an "educator", specialized in out-of-school evaluation methodologies. In addition, the team will comprise specialists in psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology as well as in programmed instruction and curriculum production.

20. In addition, there will be a Regional Development Advisory Commission made up of specialists from all the agencies working in the Regional and which are members of the Board. Its role will be consultative but may become essential as the commission will ensure coordination between the "module" and all non-educational operations conducted on the regional scale.

21. At the Departmental level will be the departmental Coordinator whose function is not only substantive (ensure that programmes correspond to departmental production projects) but administrative as he is the only Module official acting at a level of administrative deconcentration (there are no "normal" administrative structures at the Regional level). It is at the level of the Department that one finds representatives of the local authorities as well as those of the Central Administration. It is the conventional and coherent politico-administrative unit below the Central Government.

22. Finally, at the zonal (sub-departmental) level another coordinator will cover 40 "monitores" (two "monitores" per out-of-school unit), guiding, supervising, advising, evaluating and occasionally gathering his working teams, ensuring again that programme content is consistent with local production or societal objectives and that operations involve agents from the responsible institutions already present -or to be brought-in the zone.

23. At this writing the project has been approved by the Secretary General of the Planning Council and by the Minister of Education and endorsed by the President of the Republic as well as by the Finance Minister. Most institutions who are to be members of the Board participated in the design of the project and concur with it, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and the Director of the Vocational training Institute (INTECAP). It may therefore be said that the design stage has been finished and that operations are due to start under the best of auspices.

iii. Speculations on the credibility of the design.

24. This seems to be therefore a good time to start raising some specific questions related to this enterprise as they may, in turn, bing out some general problems bessetting attempts at regional planning of education.

25. We shall concentrate our attention on the credibility or operativeness of the proposed design. For indeed what is at stake in all planning attempts is less the boldness or originality of the concept but the capacity of those who designed it to envision realistically the conditions under which their intentions will become -or not- part of the every day life of the individuals they hold out as their supreme objectives. In the present case what needs to be reflected upon is whether the organization proposed for the Module is likely to be the appropiate media to transform the "idea" into an activity which will improve the living conditions (accrued real and monetary income as well as "quality" factors, such as food, health and gradually... social existence).

26. Conveniently we may classify the questions by levels of decision-making: national or central, regional (the Highland Area), departmental, zonal or local. Two of these levels correspond to actually delineated administrative structures and functions: the "Central and the "Departmental". One is artificial and "project-centered", the"Regional", while the "Zonal" may be artificial but may coincide with the larger communities, the "municipios" which do have a specific administrative existence. Finally, the fifth level -the local or lowest- is a

living or societal reality -the community- although it does not coincide as a rule, with any administrative or institutional definition.

27. Before embarking on specific questions, a prior issue may be raised almost as a "point of order". ¿Is it realistic to propose an organizational structure which is not homogenously linked to the existing administrative infraestructure? We can only suggest that it is probably not as irrational as it may appear. It is a compromise between total identification with conventional structures and autonomous institutions-building. The first extreme represents and obvious danger. Administrations, at best, are jealous of their "sovereignty"; at worst, they may be "imperalistic" and devour the activities and budgets of any creature careless enough to be under their protection. The other extreme would encourage local administrative authorities -having received no instructions from the "center"-at best, to turn their back on such a venture and allow it to die of attrition (lack of recognition, let alone support); and at worst, to mobilize efforts to thwart the ambition of any operation wanting to "go it alone". In short, the proposed administrative links are a reflection of the need to play the "power game" within the administrative "football field" if the Plan is to be translatable in a institutional (i.e, administrative) language. Like all gambits, this one involves a sizeable share of risk caused by the heterogeneousness, and therefore potential unmanageability of the structure, but -at the same time- that is precisely why a wilful attempt has been made to minimize the dangers spelled out above by introducing a dual nature in the

proposed structure of the "module".

28. Taking first the Board, the question which arises is whether such a reunion of Government Ministries and agencies can really guide and orient the proposed operations of the "Module" as well as lay down conditions and issue instructions for coordinated action at the national level. In other words, can a formal representation of high level Government officials meet with regularity and prepare as well as follow up such meetings? It may be that such a formal reunion is a necessary, although not a sufficient, instrument to demonstrate the existence of a common desire to develop new activities. The delegations of authority to the individual agencies represented are possible only if a concensus is apparently arrived at before implementation orders can be given. In fact the Board is to be the highest level "political" body expected to screen the opportunity of specific operations to be conducted within a Plan which may have been previously defined but which may have to be altered or re-directed according to circumstances.

29. The very purpose of the "Module" calls for some measure of structural change in agricultural production, for example, and the Board would be a useful locus for discussing the implications of this proposition for an out-of-school policy. It may raise issues such as the nature and the conditions of the connection between the development and expansion of the "Module" and agricultural settlement schemes, establishment,of cooperatives, extension programmes, etc.. Such considerations may lead the

Board to throttle some activities or launch new ones. Logically, such a global examination and joint decisions will impose a measure of discipline on all participants, redistributing roles and resources as circumstances warrant it. It may serve to focus political attention on burning, yet unresolved, issues such as land tenure.

30. The Regional Coordinator will be the "active reflection" of the Board. If interagency programmes are decided upon, the Regional man acting on the spot in behalf of the Board will really be as effective as the pooled resources he is to control will permit it. At his level will be found the true test of the existence of a Regional Plan. Such an action-oriented programme will need to count on decentralized powers. If the Central Government agencies shun the delegation of the necessary authority to the coordinator it will really spell the relative inaplicability of the Module. His last resort will be the Advisory Commission on Which will sit representatives from the agencies. If these representatives are of sufficiently high level and command authority at the capital, indeed the Coordinator may be given a budget and -thereby- real authority. If the delegates are local agency representatives who will need to refer to the agency's headquarters this, again, may frustrate the coordinator's efforts. This, then, is the most sensitive and delicate part of the complex administrative machinery proposed for the Module. "Sensitive" because it is here that the intentions of individual Board members will become apparent, and "delicate" because if the resources are not forthcoming and the Coordinator is blocked, it

is from this locus that the "Red light" will be flashed for the entire operation.

31. An example might be taken from a Unicef-supported project in neighbouring. El Salvador: it is concerned essentially with integrated community development programmes involving three ministries and two other government agencies in a pilot area covering parts of two Eastern Departments. Although a Regional committee, with a full-time executive acting as chairman, did include representation from all agencies and all its decisions were taken in common it has achieved almost no palpable action so far. The cause does not lie in the motivation of the Committee members most of whom are exceptionally young, enthusiastic and hard working. Nor does it lie in the non-identification of the committee's territorial structure (overlapping two departments) with the conventional departmental administrative institutions, as this was satisfactorily resolved by personnal contacts between the Executive and the two Governors. Rather, the inefficiency has its roots in the resistance of the Central Administration to authorize "prior clearance" for coordinated action (all collective decisions had to be "disaggregated" into individual requests from each agency representative to his respective Headquarters) and -more serious still- in the absence of any earmarked resources for the Project as such. Thus, having neither a pool of individual resources from each participant nor the means to dispose of a "priming" budget, to initiate operations which others may follow, the Project is still hovering between a hoped for take-off and and a likely crash...

32. At the Departmental level we meet up again with traditional administrative structures. This is a necessity for many regional plans have been foiled in the past for ignoring too crudely the conventional institutions which do represent a power -base without the support of which it is unlikely that any project can survive. The Departmental Coordinator is to preserve the link and increase the complementarity between the "Administration of sovereignty" which is essentially geared to maintainance of law order and unkeep of infraestucture and the "Administration of Development" implied in agricultural production and social promotion programmes. He is expected to use the resources of the former to strengthen the latter. This role is coupled with the information function involved in "receiving signals" from the production sector in order to orient the Module's Programme. His credibility will also rest on the existence of a desire to coordinate the human, financial and material resources of all ministries and agencies concerned. He may be helped by the earmarked resources of the Department, which is a live administrative entity, receiving regularly-and legally- inputs from the Center, which it may re-allocated within certain limits.

33. At the zonal level we may run into a new type of difficulty of an intra-sectoral nature - as opposed to the previous inter-agency or inter-sectoral coordination and resource pooling. This difficulty may come from within the Education school sub-system. Its origin may be marked by the decision to appoint bi-lingual "monitores" (maximum previous formal education:

6 years) to apply the Module at the local level. The school teachers, already opposed to the use of these "monitores" for kindergarten-level gradual introduction of the spanish language to indian children, may well resist the presence of "competitors" whose salaries and conditions of tenure may be seen as a threat. The Zonal Coordinator may therefore be faced with the problem of coordinating his work with the school supervisor in attempting to avoid frictions, if no obstacles, between the school and informal education personnel.

34. We come now to what is the human test of the viability of the "module": will it be seen by the villagers as an instrument to promote change in their way of life or as another form of schooling? All will depend on the ability of the coordinated teams to develop an educational content in harmony with the motivations of the indian population in each different site.

35. Implicit in this answer is the possibility of coming close to an understanding not only of the explicit motivations(to produce and earn "more") but of implicit motivations affecting their family and community structures. Much of course will also depend on the capacity of the "monitores" to dovetail their actions with that of other agents visiting the communities where the Module will be operated. To be sure, the quality of the material -written and radio delivered- is also important. Yet, essential to the success of this enterprise is the existence of a feed-back mechanism so that gradually the Module not be an instrument ruling the village but one they can master and consider their own, fitting

their needs, and adapted to the rythm of their lives. Only then can the dialogue begin between the villagers and the educator who may gradually "add" to the Module more universal values and cognitive messages than those falling within the scope of the villagers' motivations.

iv. Conclusive thoughts.

36. In the guise of a conclusion it may be suggested that the feasibility of the Module rests on three key issues:

(a) structural changes of a political nature decided by the highest authorities if they are to permit the Module to become an instrument of change. (Is there much need to develop new production habits if there is no land?)

(b) administrative decisions permitting effective decentralization including a Regional budget so as to give the required flexibility to the multi-agency teams working at the three levels between the Government and the villagers (Region-Department-Zone)

(c) Convergence of the Module's content and method with the villagers' resources, needs and aspirations.

37. The project is on the threshold of action as it is slated to start preparations as of January 1975 and large scale operations one year later, gathering speed with each passing year until it will have covered the entire target population by 1980. The Design stage is finished but constant retooling will be imposed by experience. In "learning by doing" the Guatemala authorities, assuming a calculated risk, may run into resistances and reticences

both from the Module "producers" (specialists or administrators) and its future "customers". Likewise, action -if it is swift and or an economy of scale consistent with the requirements- may generate acceleration phenomena reducing effective or potential obstacles.

38. Nevertheless, while it is obviously impossible to predict to what extent the Design did reflect the reality in the field it is not unfair to suggest that it did attempt to take into account whatever quantitative, descriptive and ... intuitive knowledge there was about past failures and present problems. In two years from now we should know reliable this knowledge base has been.

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